The Generation and Transfer of the "Sweet" Category in Calligraphy Appreciation

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Abstract. Ancient Chinese calligraphy theories often "discuss calligraphy by taste". "Taste" is an essential category of classical Chinese aesthetics, and is a concrete expression of the spirit of Chinese art. In contemporary calligraphic critical discourse, outside of the audiovisual norms, the Chinese calligraphic tradition of "discussing calligraphy by taste" is undoubtedly an ideological resource that cannot be ignored. "Gan". In English is called "pleasant" and was originally one of the five flavors, and in the Eastern Han Dynasty, it slowly developed the meaning of "Tian" (sweet) to describe the taste. "Sweet", as an aesthetic category, appeared in a large number of poetry, calligraphy, and painting theories in the Ming and Qing dynasties and beyond. Since the Tang Dynasty, "Sweet" has been combined with "Vulgar". The word "Sweet" was formally introduced into the realm of painting and calligraphy appreciation. This article utilizes the theory of aesthetics and combines it with physiology, psychology, and other disciplines to explain discussing calligraphy by "Sweet". An analysis of the generation and transfer of the category of "Sweet" in the appreciation of calligraphy reveals the mutual borrowing and influence of art theories. After sorting and analyzing, it can be seen that "Sweet" refers to works that are overly modified, not chewable, and have no flavor outside the taste. Or works with too much "craftsmanship", too much skill, too much ink, and works that are opposite to the beauty of "clumsiness" and "lightness" appreciated by ancient calligraphers.

Keywords: Sweet, taste of calligraphy, aesthetic experience, calligraphy appreciation.

1. Introduction

Discussing calligraphy by "Sweet" is a case study of the theory of "Flavor". Previous studies on it were either micro or macro, lacking a clear theoretical definition. In the field of poetry theory, there have been papers discussing the generation and migration of the category of "Sweet". However, there are many theoretical writings on "Sweet" in poetry, calligraphy, and painting throughout the ages, and there is still room for research. In the field of calligraphy, there are articles analyzing the artistic style of "Light" of monks' calligraphy with the examples of Bada Shanren and Hongyi Master. The focus is on analyzing the inner meaning of the "light flavor", but not on the "calligraphy flavor" itself, nor the "Sweet" [1]. Western literary theorists are concerned with the Chinese "theory of taste" through the lens of poetics. At the same time, they are concerned about the importance of the sense of taste in life. They believe that taste judgment exceeds the standard of audio-visual judgment and is not a commonly used critical tool in the West, but it is an indispensable concept in Chinese literary criticism [2].

Japanese scholars also have some opinions about the "theory of taste", believing that the sense of the beauty of ancient Chinese originated from the sense of taste for "food": The most primitive aesthetic sense of the Chinese people ultimately originates from the gustatory sensation of "Sweet". The original meaning of the Chinese character "Mei" (beauty), using a philological approach, is that it refers to the good taste of food [3]. Although this statement is precise and accurate, it only asserts that "Mei" originates from the sense of taste using literal exegesis.

The difference between this paper and many calligraphy theory articles lies in the broader perspective of the discussion and the novelty of the angle of the discussion. Based on previous research, read calligraphy theories and inscriptions from the pre-Qin to the Qing Dynasty, and some of the original texts of music, painting, and literature related to the "theory of taste", grasping the results of the important ideas of the "theory of taste". Extract important material and analyze and summarize them. A theoretical discussion of the issues related to discussing calligraphy by "Sweet",

with calligraphy as the centerpiece, systematically cleaning up and accurately recognizing this wealth in the theory of Chinese calligraphy, promoting the development of calligraphy education at home and abroad, and broadening new ideas for the aesthetic education of calligraphy.

2. Generation of "Sweet" Theory

Talking about beauty and calligraphy in terms of taste can be regarded as one of the characteristics of China's ancient calligraphic theories. According to some scholars, if look for a word that can represent the aesthetic stance and attitude of Chinese art, it is really "taste". In his *History of Chinese Aesthetics*, Li Zehou suggests that: What was initially called the "beautiful" without being confused with the "good" was exclusively in terms of taste, sound, and color [4]. *Shuowen Jiezi* (a book explaining and analyzing characters) associates "beautiful" with "Sweet" [5]. The Chinese people's first sense of beauty seems to come from sweet and crunchy food. In the "Shun Dian" chapter and the "Hong Fan" chapter of the Shangshu (a compendium of writings tracing the deeds of antiquity), "food" is regarded as the priority of civil affairs, which shows that the ancients knew that "food is the most important thing for the people". It was in a state of mind where food, land, and harmony were revered and honored that the "five flavors" were slowly born. The "five flavors" here are "Tian" (sweet), "Suan" (sour), "Ku" (bitter), "La" (pungent), and "Xian" (salty). The "five flavors" used to discuss the calligraphy is "synesthesia" -- depicting the visual with the sense of taste. "Synesthesia" is a very common research object in the aesthetic psychology of modern aesthetics. Mainly refers to the aesthetic process of "sensory composite", or "sensory displacement". Qian Zhongshu once said in his essay *Synesthesia* that: In everyday experience, the senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste can often be connected. Eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and body, the domains of each faculty can be unbounded. Colors seem to have a temperature, sounds seem to have an image, warmth and cold seem to have a weight, and smells seem to have a body [6]. The use of "synesthesia" has been around for a long time in art criticism. During the Southern Dynasties period, Liuxie's Wenxin Diao Long (a literary theory book) utilized "synesthesia" to depict the aesthetic realm of work from a positive perspective. This is inextricably linked to the ancient Chinese way of thinking that emphasizes intuition and experience.

3. Development of the "Sweet and Vulgar" Perspective

The first combination of "Sweet" and "Vulgar" can be traced back to the special book on exegetical sound and meaning, *The Sound and Meaning of the Tripitaka*, compiled by Xuan Ying, a Buddhist monk in the Tang Dynasty. This book catalogs words that are confused in the Buddhist scriptures, labeling the pronunciation and meaning below the words. It is of great value in ancient Chinese philology and phonetics. In the original text, the word "sweet thing" is interpreted as "sweet and vulgar", which lays the foundation for the meaning of "Sweet" as "Vulgar" [7]. Zhang Huaiguans Pingshuyaoshilun (a book on calligraphic theory) used the word "Sweet" to describe villainous and vulgar calligraphy. Popular and vulgar calligraphy relies on imitation, and it's easy to learn how to do it right. However, Zhang Huaiguan thought that although this kind of writing looked beautiful, it was despicable and vulgar. In this case, "Sweet" means vulgar [8]. "Sweet" was formally used in art during the reign of Emperor Ningzong of the Southern Song Dynasty. Commenting on the paintings and poems, Dai Xu said "A painter's painting loses its divinity if it is sweet, and a poet's poem is superb if it is bitter. "In the same era, the monk Jujan's *Short Comments on Sweet Paintings* said paintings that need to depict objects should not only write the shape of the object but also convey the spirit of the object. If it is not possible to "write spirit", the term "Sweet" is used to describe this kind of painting which is not good [9].

Although, in the Southern Song Dynasty, both Dai Xu and Ju Jian had already used the word "Sweet" to describe paintings, "Sweet" in later painting theories mostly was attributed to Huang Gongwang, a painter in the Yuan Dynasty and his *Tips for landscape painting* (a theoretical book on

painting). Tao Zongyi, a literary scholar and historian in the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties, in his *Farming in Nan Village* (a note on the history of the Yuan dynasty), quoted Huang Gongwang as saying: "To make a painting, one must remove the four characters, which are evil, sweet, vulgar, and trickery [10]." Ming Dynasty painter Wang Fu's *Calligraphy and Painting Biography* (a book on calligraphy and painting) said that strokes should not be intricate, otherwise, they will be "Vulgar", and "Vulgar" will lose flavor. He explained the meaning of "evil, sweet, vulgar, and trickery" in terms of painting techniques [11]. In the Qing Dynasty, painter Shen Zongqian's *Jiezhouxuehuabian* (a book on painting) argued that Zhao Mengfu, a calligrapher in the Yuan Dynasty, first put forward the four words of "sweet, evil, vulgar, and trickery "as the major taboos in calligraphy and painting. Perhaps because Huang Gongwang had studied under Zhao Mengfu in his early years [12].

In the Ming Dynasty, as the style of Yuan paintings was gradually absorbed by the Ming literati painters, Huang Gongwang's theory of "Sweet" was more and more emphasized. There were many references in the theories of painting and calligraphy in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. According to painter Chen Yan's *Chashanglaoshe* in the Ming Dynasty (an examination-based note), if calligraphy and painting are too colorful, soft, and mature, they will be "Sweet" [13]. Fang Xun in the Qing Dynasty had similar views. In his *Shanjingjuhualun,* a treatise on painting, he said that professional painters and calligraphers should avoid "Sweet" styles, but people know that vulgarity, pedantry, and stereotypes are bad, but they don't know that "Sweet" is also bad. It's not just about painting and calligraphy, it's about avoiding "Sweet" as a person [12]. *Yuchuangmanbi*, a note by Wang Yuanqi, there is an article that talks about how ink should be used in a relaxed manner, from light to strong. Preserve the clean, delete the sweet and vulgar, replenish the delicate, and break the stereotypical [14].

The most important is the calligrapher Dong Qichang's theory of "Sweet" in *Huachanshisuibi,* a theoretical book on calligraphy and painting in the Ming Dynasty [15]. It can be said that the theory of "Sweet" proliferated in the poetry, calligraphy, and painting of the Qing Dynasty, and its source was Dong Qichang. After the middle of the Ming Dynasty, the "Wumen School of Painting", which dominated the painting world gradually declined. Most painters did not know the ancient master but only knew to copy Wen Zhengming, leader of the" Wumen School of Painting ". Later, some even left Wen Zhengming to study under Qiu Ying. As a result, the style of the "Wumen School of Painting" of painting formed a "habit" and showed a "deliberate". Dong Qichang, who was the center of painting theory in the late Ming Dynasty, called the "Wumen School of Painting" painters "craftsmen" and described their paintings as "sweet and vulgar", which is opposed to the "scholarly quality" advocated by Dong Qichang and other late Ming literati. Dong Qichang refused to accept "resemblance" and opposed "intentionality", and regarded such "sweet and vulgar" as an "evil realm". On the contrary, the scholar-artist added calligraphy to painting, breaking through the boundaries of technique, and thus entering the state of free creation, expressing the spirit of the chest. Naturally, they would not fall into the "craftsmen's evil realm". "Scholarly quality" as opposed to "Sweet" is "elegance", that transcends the mundane. In short, Dong Qichang believed that "sweet and vulgar" was the "evil realm", which reflected his aesthetic sense: he disparaged craftsmen and praised "scholarly quality". He rejected "stereotypes" and advocated the inclusion of calligraphy in painting.

4. Discussing Calligraphy by "Sweet"

Zhenjun, a calligrapher in the Qing Dynasty, first used the term "sweet and ripe" to describe calligraphy in his *Tianzhiouwen*, a miscellany of Beijing's customs and traditions. He believed that if one did not study calligraphy in-depth, and did not carefully observe the model calligraphy, one would fall into the wrong path of "sweet and ripe" [16]. "Sweet and vulgar" can also evaluate seals. Zhou Liang-gong, in his article *Discussing Seals with Jishu,* claimed that the seals engraved by Jishu were able to avoid being "sweet and vulgar and had lasting charm, seeing the nature and heart of the author [17]. Liang Tongshu, a calligrapher in the Qing Dynasty, commented that Luo Mu's calligraphy works Huangtingjing lacked depth, and no bookishness in *Pinluoan Preface and Postscript.* (a collection of

poems and essays). He estimated that the author was not highly educated, but a person who only wrote poems and inscribed paintings [18].

In contemporary society, Zhao Mengfu is undoubtedly one of the most controversial calligraphers. Much of the commentary that accompanies him has to do with "sweet and vulgar". Lu Xinyuan is an expert in collecting books from the Qing Dynasty. His book, *Rangliguanguoyanlu,* on calligraphy and painting, evaluated that the calligraphic work of Ming Dynasty calligrapher Yao Yundong had spirit and ancient meaning, similar to the calligraphy of the sage Zhao Mengfu, unlike other learners of Zhao Mengfu's calligraphy, who had the drawbacks of being soft, sweet, vulgar, light, and flimsy [19]. Since the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, the evaluation of Zhao Mengfu's calligraphy has undergone a change from "high-spirited and vigorous" to "weak and vulgar", continuing to influence the perceptions of some people today. One of the reasons for this was the large number of people who studied Zhao when Zhao's calligraphies were in full bloom. Pseudo-Zhao calligraphic works were commonplace. Under their pen, Zhao Mengfu's calligraphic style became soft, slippery, vulgar, and lost in spirit.

According to relevant experts, Volume of Letter Writing and poetries by Zhao Mengfu compiled by *Shiqu Baoji First ed,* a large-scale cataloged document in the Qing Dynasty, has several pseudo-Zhao calligraphic works. The authenticity of some so-called "masterpieces" by Zhao Mengfu is debatable. And some critics can't tell the difference between real and fake, evaluating these fake or controversial ones as if they were authentic. They did not realize that Zhao Mengfu's calligraphy was in fact "florid but not lacking in strength, flowing but not sweet, elegant in style, and clear in elegance [20]." The vulgar works were only for those who learned from Zhao Mengfu but did not put their heart into it. Not only Zhao Mengfu but also Dong Qichang, who is famous for his "vigorous and elegant" calligraphy, is also characterized by stability and regularity. If learners of calligraphy only see the surface and not see the inside, it is also easy to write vulgarly. Liangyan in the Qing Dynasty, in his *Commentary on Calligraphy* said that Zhao Mengfu's calligraphy was "Vulgar" and Dong Qichang's "weak". He was warning the learners of the above two calligraphers to avoid shortcomings and falling into the commonplace [15]. Over the same time period, Shaozhang and Feng Shoujing's *Annals of a County of Dantu* evaluated Zhang Xuelin's calligraphy as having an ancient meaning without sweetness and vulgarity, and as being stripped of Dong Qichang's calligraphy without falling into the mold [21]. In recent times, the use of the term "sweet and vulgar" in the appreciation of calligraphy is numerous, far more than the ancients, and has become one of the most commonly used terminologies in contemporary appreciation of "discussing calligraphy by taste".

"Sweet" as one of the "five flavors", under the pen of Zhang Huaiguan, evolved into a negative meaning for "base person" and "vulgar calligraphy". Later interpreted by Huang Gongwang, Dong Qichang, and others, it often referred to works with gaudy colors, heavy craftsmanship, and exposed techniques in Ming and Qing painting theories. Later on, the "Sweet" theory appeared widely in contemporary calligraphy criticism. "Sweet" is contrary to the aesthetic pursuits of the literati, "clumsy" and "light", referring to the works which have no internal content and no flavor outside the taste. From the appearance of the word "Sweet" in poetic treatises, which later migrated to painting and calligraphy treatises, it can be seen that since the beginning of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the collection and appreciation of calligraphy and painting has proliferated and the aesthetics of the gentlemen are slowly becoming the same. The theories of calligraphy and literature in art theory influence each other, and the interaction between the theories of calligraphy and painting is becoming more and more frequent.

5. Conclusion

The emergence of "taste" tells people that the aesthetic scope of calligraphy can be expanded according to the times. Compared with "discussing poetry by Taste, there are fewer treatises on "discussing calligraphy by Taste", lagging slightly behind the field of literature. This article is dedicated to filling the gap of discussing calligraphy by "Sweet" and supplementing the "discussing

calligraphy by taste. Through interpretation, it is not difficult to find that the category of "Sweet" has many shortcomings compared to other complete theories in the aesthetic category of calligraphy. This reveals that when people study the aesthetic category of calligraphy, should look at things with dialectical thinking, taking the essence and removing the dross. Researchers should propose solutions to the shortcomings and strengthen the communication between aesthetic categories, to realize the perfection of the category of "Sweet" in calligraphy. Based on the author's ability, it is difficult to extract the content of the "taste of calligraphy" from numerous theories, which requires the researcher to search for a lot of information, but also has considerable sensitivity. Moreover, the topic is multidisciplinary, and the "Sweet" in discussing calligraphy by taste "involves philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, literature, and so on. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to do this ideally. Based on this, the author hopes that other people who learn calligraphy in the future will continue to dig into the relevant original texts and later commentaries, further enriching the appreciation of the "taste of calligraphy" and establishing a comprehensive and systematic study for discussing calligraphy by "Sweet".

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